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The Overlooked Military Implications of the 5G Debate

Much attention has been paid to the economic and espionage implications of a Chinese lead in developing and operating 5G infrastructure, but the military implications remain largely overlooked.

Blog Post *by* Guest Blogger for Net Politics

April 25, 2019



A woman stands at the booth of Huawei featuring 5G technology at the PT Expo in Beijing, China September 28, 2018. Reuters/Stringer provided by China Out

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Last week, the U.S. Defense Innovation Board released a report outlining the risks and opportunities for the United States in the global race to develop 5G. This followed a damning report published by the United Kingdom's Huawei Cyber Security Centre Oversight Board detailing how the Chinese telecom giant's 5G products, particularly its software, contained significant vulnerabilities and that the company had failed to remedy persistent poor security practices. 5G network architecture uses high frequency spectrum to enable significantly faster speeds to process larger amounts of data with lower latency and greater device connectivity. While much attention has been paid to economic and espionage implications of a potential Chinese lead in developing and operating 5G infrastructure, there are important military implications that remain largely overlooked.

There are economic implications for which entities can secure the greatest global market share of 5G technology. Technological innovation drives economic growth, job creation, and global economic influence. Huawei may have a long-term market advantage over U.S and Western telecoms because the former has been able to offer 5G products at far cheaper rates than the latter. Furthermore, there are also concerns that Chinese-built 5G technology is likely to contain backdoors that could be used to enable Chinese economic or national security espionage. It is unlikely that Beijing would actively monitor all of the content of the data that comes across Huawei owned or operated infrastructure (although it may collect and analyze metadata). However, it is

